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FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8544
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 8371
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 0162
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 0006
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ PRIORITY 0142
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 0145
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO PRIORITY 0158
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH AFB UK PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000136

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA, DS/IP/AF, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/OSAC
ZAGREB FOR AMBASSADOR BRADTKE
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON
DOE FOR GPERSON, CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS, SRENENDER, DFIELDS
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS USTR FOR ASST USTR FLISER
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
STATE PASS TDA FOR NCABOT
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2017

TAGS: ASEC CASC EPET KDEM NI PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: SITREP 18: HOSTAGES RELEASED; 3 EXPATS KIDNAPPED,
INCREASED MILITARY PRESENCE IN NIGER DELTA

REF: A. LAGOS 128

1B. LAGOS 124

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

Amcit and Nigerian Pivot-GIS Employees Released

11. (C) Pivot employees American citizen Bill Graham and Nigerian national Ezekiel Akwa were released from captivity on February 17. Once State Security Service (SSS) had established some leverage in their communications with the kidnappers and once Rivers State Governor Peter Odili lent the matter full attention, the hostage release occurred quickly and with ease, according to John Walker of Control Risks Group (CRG), Pivot's security consultant. Both Graham and Akwa, held for 25 days, contracted malaria and were receiving treatment in Port Harcourt. Graham was debriefed by Walker on February 18, Akwa the day after. Graham does not plan to leave Nigeria until his malaria treatment has been completed, and then his exit might only be temporary.

Walker reported Graham could return to Nigeria--though he was considering moving his family to Lagos. Fellow hostage British citizen Neil Mirrlees, who was released prior to Graham, was also reconsidering a return to Nigeria, according to Walker.

¶2. (C) During their last 10 days in captivity, Graham and Akwa were given little to drink or eat, they said. In a conversation with the Director of Rivers State Security Service (SSS), Walker learned the kidnappers told SSS they had been surveilling Mirrlees and Graham for 5 days before the kidnapping occurred. To speed the release, the SSS reportedly resorted to disinformation to unnerve the kidnappers. They told Prince Igodo, the leader of the kidnappers, President Obasanjo was going to allow U.S. military intervention in the Niger Delta. The kidnappers purportedly believed this. Walker thought it unlikely SSS asked an Ijaw elder to open an additional line of communication. (Ref B) Rather, Walker posited that SSS told Pivot this to assuage them while SSS limited communication with the kidnappers to "make Prince Igodo sweat."

Three Expatriates Kidnapped In Port Harcourt

¶3. (C) The Consulate Regional Security Officer (RSO) confirmed reports that two Croatian and one Montenegrin expatriates working for Hydrodrive International, an offshore oil service company, were abducted by armed gunmen February 18. They were reportedly abducted near the Pivot-GIS boat jetty in Iwofe, a district of Port Harcourt, while at a bar. During a February 20 Niger Delta Working Group meeting, Shell and ExxonMobil told RSO these workers were not under contract; Chevron was attempting to confirm whether it has a contract with them.

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¶4. (C) A representative of Hydrodrive told a British Deputy High Commission Representative the kidnappers were demanding naira 1 billion (approximately USD 7,812,500) for the three hostages. The same group that kidnapped Graham likely perpetuated this latest episode. Walker said CRG was finalizing an agreement with Hydrodrive and that a CRG colleague was expected to arrive shortly to manage this recent incident.

Increased Militant & Military Presence in Port Harcourt

¶5. (C) On February 19, RSO received unconfirmed reports indicating a band of armed youths from Bayelsa State had entered Port Harcourt, Rivers State. According to the report, the youths were paid to eliminate Rivers State PDP gubernatorial aspirant, Chief Celestine Omehia.

¶6. (C) We also received confirmed reports on February 19 that the Nigerian military has deployed extra troops to Port Harcourt, especially near the old town, in "Operation Flush," aimed at countering militant activity. Port Harcourt locals reported a significant increase of troops in town. A Port Harcourt local contact, Chief Daniel Ebahor of the Niger Delta Peace Foundation, called the Consulate to report an increase in gunfire in the area which he attributed to "the military rounding up" armed youths and militants.

¶7. (C) A security contact said five armed militants were arrested on February 19 by State Security Service (SSS) in Port Harcourt. The group was purportedly attempting to kidnap expatriates.

¶8. (C) RSO received a confirmed report of an explosion at the Amadi-Ama traffic circle in Port Harcourt on February 18. No further details are available.

19. (C) On February 20 RSO received reports of an explosion at the University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, around 10:00 AM. No casualties were reported.

BROWNE